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Dance

2004

Senior Dance Thesis

Marjani Forté

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Sr. Thesis Workbook

WORKBOOK- THEME AND RESEARCH

The theme of my choreographic thesis was Change. This pursuit of change arose out of my frustration with social conditions, particularly, what I envisioned as ethnic superiority complexes. This idea of “superiority complex” I found in the Autobiography of Malcolm X. His discussion of this concept as one that encourages racial violence, oppression, deceit, and fear, I found to be highly relevant to my current social atmosphere. While my experience is hardly as blatant as Malcolm’s period, I found contradictions in my country’s, city’s, and university’s attempt to be “ethnically tolerant”. In fact, I was frustrated with the term “tolerance”. I believed ethnicity is not something to be tolerated, rather appreciated. Something is only tolerated when assumed to be a lower, less than, nuisance. Ethnicity is a beautiful creation of God.

My piece addressed my personal frustration with what I’d learned about my existence in the many environment’s of my life. During the piece, I had grown and somehow concluded that changing the world is a very vague and thank less pursuit. I had determined that true and equally difficult, yet most affective change happens internally. Indeed, pointing the finger, is perilous, and there is power in leading by example.

Workbook- Journals

Journal 1- September

Ok so, you want create your own score, but how. Poetry will be important, spoken word is powerful, creative, and very relevant. Put the piece on myself or Perris? Perris is beautiful, but you know what you want. Yes, but Perris is beautiful and her technical skill may truly enhance the clarity of movement and expression. Can she be as expressive as you need?

I must get the music from the movie Philadelphia- the opera piece is amazing. How will I connect that to spoken word? Can I dance that long, what will be my transitions? What do I really want to say? I want to challenge the audience to evaluate themselves. I'm so irritated with these false or missed attempts at diversity. Diversity is constant, it is not an event, it is present in policy formation, in offerings for classes, food, and music. It is demonstrated in the demographic or ethnic make up of students, it is proportionate. I am always the only African American in my classes, dance and business. How do I say this, its more than school, what the hell are we doing in Iraq!

Journal 2- October

Talk more to Karen about piece. I'm a little hesitant, because I am a little intimidated....ok a lot intimidated. Ok, let's postpone that until you are able to push out some more choreography.

Wow, that Bellarmine Forum was awesome. Great we're starting to get controversial here. How can I use this in my piece? I think it will be important for me to make my piece relevant to all cultures, social conditions, etc. I shouldn't be so specific, the issue is much bigger than LMU, Cali, or the U.S. Everyone should evaluate their dealing with ethnicity.

I found the music, and it is truly beautiful. Also, I think I am going to use that Gil Scott Heron No Knock. I hope Judy is ok with the cursing, its not much.

How about props?

Journal 3- December

Stressing a little bit about my concert showing. I know people liked it, but I feel like it needs more. Something is missing. I'm not sure yet how I want to transition the two segments. I've decided on music, but I feel I need some sort of transition, I will be tired, and I will energy for the opera climactic section.

I also need to think more about clarity of message. How do I make what I'm saying clear, I feel like it is too broad. I know I want to experiment with media, how do I that.

Journal 4- February

Ok, so I worked with Karen today. Man, she confirmed so much for me. I guess I will go with my heart has been telling me to do- I will record my own voice- how embarrassing. This recording will be my transition piece. Will that look right on stage? Who knows.

Anyway, I have a lot to do choreographically. I really need to explore more and be more innovative. Sure people lie what I do, but this is my thesis and I have to push myself. I also feel lie I can never set anything in stone. I keep changing everything. I finish a section and start all over again. I have to settle into something, that's important in order for me to move on with the piece.

I am a little frustrated. Oh and yes- I want dancers, Monique, Perris, Christine, ad Melissa, if they are available. It is a little late in the game to ask. I hope they have the time.

Journal 5- March

Well, looks like my dancers are too busy. Maybe I can ask Ka-ron to use some of the dancers from the high school. I have four girls in mind. How will I ask them? How will I pay them? This will be interesting.

I've worked with Karen about three times this month. My piece has grown so beautifully. I need to work up the stamina to last through the end. I also need to choreograph something for my dancers.

I also went to go see the theatre department to talk about media. I've begun picking out some images that I think will be extremely powerful in the background of the piece. Should I just prepare them on a slide show? I shouldn't get too excited, these will just be extra, in case the theatre department is unable to apply this type of media. The piece should stand with or without them, but I can't help feeling drawn to the images. They are so powerful and say exactly what I want to say. I typed in word like "racism", "terrorism", "exploitation", and other stuff into Googles Images and look what I got! I hope this works.

I also got fliers made to pub to family, friends, and stuff like that.

Journal 6- April

So we had an awesome adjudication process after having only one rehearsal with the girls. They are the exact girls I wanted and they are awesome. I am excited that the piece was accepted. I am nervous about performing the piece. I am nerous about how people will react to political and social statements. Its ok as long as they feel something. I f they aer moved positively, if they are angry, either way they will think about it later. I want people to think about what I said. How will I thank Karen.

Workbook- Discussion of the Dancers

My dancers. After working at LACHSA since September, I had learned quite a bit about the dancers, their environment, their behavior, etc. Never thinking that I would actually work with them, I paid little attention to their interest in me, as both their classmate at times, and their instructor.

When I decided to ask for their participation in my project, I had already chosen 4 dancers I wanted. Nonetheless I offered the project to the entire department, believing that I don't want dancers who don't want the project. I figured those who volunteered would be committed, dedicated, and sincerely interested in the message and the performance experience. I also spoke of the dancers I used in years prior, for an earlier choreographic project, *Zawadi* 2002 (LMU Student Dance Concert).

As fate would have it, the four dancers I had chosen in my head were the only four dancers who made a particular effort to let me know that they wanted to do the project. We chose each other, somewhere in the heavens.

They turned out to be a great inspiration. Their talent exceeded all expectations; they were receptive, flexible, sincere, and honest in their approach to the movement. They were independent, or their parents were giving. We got to know each other very personally, and truly made an impact on each others lives.

Workbook- Costumes and Lighting

I am terrible at these loose ends. However, we made it work- myself, the costume department, Marissa (costume designer), and Karen McDonald. The costumes were designed with several elements in mind- Change, African- American Flag color scheme, different types of women. Each scheme was relevant to me. The dancers were representative of all that makes me, as well as other types of women.

Their first set of costumes highlighted the different roles of women and their levels of oppression- the housewife, the business women's man like suit, the nun (perhaps feeling constricted by her garment), and the Victorian women squeezed into her corset. Different cultures, different levels of restriction/oppression (even if self-inflicted). The colors of these costumes would correlate with the colors of their leotards in the second half. The leotards were representative of freedom, simplicity, unity through autonomy, but diversity in color, and yet all apart of me- the color scheme representative of my and African American statement and perspective.

The lighting I designed prior to my tech rehearsal, and wrote out, so that we might be able to focus on the slide projection. I also wanted to assure that the lighting did not conflict with the slide projection. I knew the projection was a long shot. When I actually saw it manifest, as I had dreamed, I was extremely pleased. I must admit I grew a little dependent on it.

Workbook- Music and Publicity

The music was originally offered to me by a prominent choreographer in the hip hop genre- Fatima Robinson. She gave me a number of CDs that she thought might be relevant to the piece and I sorted through them. However I was sure on two things- I wanted the opera from *Philadelphia- Le Momma e Morta*, and I wanted spoken word. One of the CDs she gave me was Gil Scott Heron, a prominent spoken word and jazz musician of the 70's. I found on this CD "No Knock" which spoke to the audacity and superiority complex, I was addressing in my piece.

My score was developed later on. I sat down and simply began to write. As somewhat of a poet and spoken word artist, myself, I began to apply my writing and speaking experience to the piece. Surely I could be as professional and clear as an artist I would ask? I finally recorded the word with Gary, and solidified the entire musical score.

In terms of publicity, I was inspired by Anni and her publicity for her thesis last year. She had personal fliers that publicized her work specifically and I thought that was not only creative, but strategic. That way people would come to the concert and enjoy the other works as well as your own. I had my friend Frava Burgess graphically design the flier, using a photograph taken by another friend, Nia Ujamaa.

Workbook- Post Concert Reflection

I am extremely proud of the work I presented, April 21-24, 2004. My biggest fear was that I would cheat myself by not challenging myself choreographically, waiting to the last minute, or using different mediums. Ok, so maybe waited a little too long to design my costumes, but I hate that part. Chorographically and in my performance I transitioned myself. I became a better dancer and choreographer because of this experience. I would love to present this piece over and over again. It was complete. Never finished, but complete.

WHAT IS DANCE?

WHAT IS DANCE- MOVEMENT WITH INTENTION

What is dance? Edward Hall in more words or less describes dance as integrating the activities of the brain. Some say dance is the expression of the human body in motion where the intention is to aspire to move beyond pedestrian movement. Some would argue that dance is purely movement. As operational definitions they all hold a degree of validity, yet personal experience leads me to conclude dance as movement with intention. This provides for a broad category of movement cultural, theatrical, and pedestrian. An unborn child or infant moving in discovery, a dying person moving through their transition, a performed solo mimicking life's various challenges- all non-verbal, full body, and intent-driven, to communicate to the various dimensions of human understanding. This is dance as it occurs in the varying elements of the human experience.

Having briefly defined dance as movement with intention, the question arises of why people dance and how is it a confirmation of this theory. When we observe dance, and it connects to a spiritual or emotional place, we tend to embody it physically.

When we watch dance we really not only see with our eyes but we empathize with our muscles. In a way our muscles absorb the energy we are witnessing. We get the 'message' not only in our intellect and our eyes, but we also feel it emphatically in our bodies. (John Martin)

Martin is describing Kinetic Mimicry, a term for moving as a result of absorbing energy. Because dance has the power to connect to a spiritual and emotional place, dancers often intend to touch the hearts and minds of their viewers. *I* intend to stimulate the hearts and minds of my viewers and while words may be of great use, they do not justify and

capture the feeling behind the message or story. People also dance for the personal fulfillment and meditative quality. This is to say that dance, in its profound ability to communicate through intention to the non-verbal receptors of the human make-up, is a medium for both introspective and retrospective reflection.

Because the performance of dance, as movement with intention, maintains this communicative and therapeutic power, audience and dancers have the opportunity to make our experiences more fulfilling, more significant, and comprehensive. “To create, to envision beyond what is”....dance allows for this kind of growth. Though the tendency is to apply art (in this case dance) to life, to understand life as it applies to art, provides a different outlook and level of understanding. As dance is about repetition for perfection, making an impact and connection to some kind of energy or spirit- so is life. To make mistakes and perfect the practice of life, to be impactful and impacted, to make connections spiritually, energetically, is essential to a purposeful and fulfilling life, as it is art (dance).

To explore dance culturally we might gain a clearer understanding of the power of dance, as movement with intention. The study of dance of the Philippines, African and African American dance, Native American Traditions, East Indian dance, dance of Hawaii, ballet and modern American dance, delineates similarities and differences that support this concept (dance as movement with intention).

A reoccurring theme in the studied dance forms was a compelling desire to give thanks and praise to some or many omnipotent forms. Each culture acknowledged the sovereignty of a God or many gods.

They dance to appease ancestors and gods, to cure ailments, to insure success in war-making activities, to insure bountiful harvests, for general warfare and recreation and as an outlet for repressed feelings, to mark milestones in the life cycles of birth, wedding, and death. (Article on Filipino Dance).

While this article is culture specific it applies to a wide range of dance forms. The work of dance instructor and lecturer Lady Walquer is a prime example of this parallel. Her theory is based in movement in its purest form, colors and rhythms, how they each are incorporated into human lives, and finally how these elements are linked in the African tradition. With this theory she explores musical instruments, why humans relate to music, and how the African drum, made of “like kind” (flesh), demonstrates this concept- permeating the soul and reflecting the rhythm of our heart. She further investigates demi-gods worshipped in Africa, Haiti, and Brazil; each god correlating with a color, the color connecting to a mood or reaction, the reaction linked to a rhythm, and the rhythm coupled to a movement. This is the “movement” I classify as dance, as it is the embodiment and manifestation of these elements, with the sole intention of worship.

East Indian dance also honors the existence of God. The East Indian culture developed a story explaining why dance was created, a demonstration of their understanding of dance as movement with intention. This story brings honor to their dancers and their performance space, which must be blessed by their four gods who protect it from demons that attempt to destroy the art form.

The Hawaiian culture also brings intention of movement in their worship of God through dance. Their dance is given further purpose, as the Hawaiian culture has few

written artifacts. Their culture and story is preserved in the Hula. Every dance tells an important story, significant to the culture, their beliefs, and their history.

The ballet also, originating in a religious age of the European culture, acknowledges the existence of God, and is intent-oriented in its movement and creation. Though stories of ballet are based in fairy tale and magic, the movement was created with sensitivity towards the social and religious conditions of the period. Believing heaven in the sky, and the king or ruling power in the front of the audience, ballet is constructed in the far kinesphere, up and out, with the intention to entertain and glorify these two entities, God and Royalty.

Another similarity in the cultural dance forms that speak to their intent-driven natures is their acculturated or assimilated influence throughout history. In her work, Filipino dance master Dulce Capadoucia, focused heavily on acculturating her modern and contemporary dance training with the native traditions of the Igorot tribe. Historically however, the performance of Filipino dance has assimilated with European Ballroom and social dance. Capadoucia seeks to spread the beauty the beauty of her existing culture through an intent-oriented combination of her training in American and Filipino dance.

Watching Alvin Ailey's Revelations, the idea of assimilation and influence is further demonstrated, and manifests positively. The African dance in its native form, as much of African culture, was lost to African Americans during the nineteenth century slave trade, yet Revelations is a prime example of dance that is a combination of the developments in both African and African American dance. A compelling theory, "cell

memory”, best describes this occurrence. It is believed that descendants of ancestry have a natural remembrance of their native culture, especially with movement. While Ailey was trained in African dance, surely the intention behind *Revelations* speaks to an ancestral black community. Moreover the influences of his African, Horton, and Graham dance forms combine beautifully for clarity of expression, each movement communicating and displaying something to the viewer. The undulate movement in the spine of his dancers in *Wade in the Water* is awfully familiar to the movement used to represent the demi-god Yemahya- goddess of the sea, nurturer and mother. This is one example but the parallels are endless.

This concept of the influence of African dance on American dance to communicate an idea is delineated in the nineteen- nineties film, *Dirty Dancing*. In the film social dance contained many of the undulate hip movements, jerking, and percussive movements in torso, found prominent in the African dance form. These movement qualities are less present in the European dance form (primarily ballet), however the dancers in the movie appear to be on European ancestry (by way of America). This gives eludes to the possibility of American dance as a make-up all the cultures within its geographic realm. The communicate idea is dance as a medium to understanding peoples history and ethnic make-up. Surely, this is not the intention or key concept of the movie, however, it is a present element that brings intention to the movement, other than the sexual and intimate allusions made clear in the film.

Lastly what makes the dance forms different, are the details in aesthetic, “how” they dance, not why they dance. It is the fundamental “why” that tie these dance forms under the human umbrella. Their differences are numerous and varying. Where the male

typically leads a courtship dance, in the Philippines the women lead. In European traditions where the body is separated from the mind and spirit, the Hula, East Indian, and African dance fuse the mind and spirit whole heartedly. In many cultures dance is one aspect of their history, the Hula is where most the Hawaiian culture is preserved.

Nonetheless, dance as movement with intention is culturally revealing. Though dance forms are streamed with influences and transformations, their core is preserved in the element of intention, present in the movement.

Having understood these concepts of dance defined as movement with intention, also having seen this theory proven through cultural dance forms, it is equally relevant to gain understanding of what dance is not. Any element of social interaction that de-humanizes individuals via autonomy, insult of character, and other moments that adversely affect human well-being, is harmful. This tends to occur in the dance world through the concept of “inclusion and exclusion”. Though it tends to be our way of organizing it tends to de-humanize the human experience by discouraging self-confidence, which when lacked manifests as apathy and self-destruct; the opposite of the human tendency to self-preserve. “Confidence depends on identity; adaptive insight depends on difference” (Mary Catherine Bateson). This is to say that though humanity is streamed with differences, our differences often define how we identify self and find our confidence. The dancer experiences inclusion and exclusion quite frequently, in auditions, in rehearsal, in performance, and more. Often the demand is to conform, to perpetuate a level autonomy, to be as the company, as the ensemble, as other dancers of the industry. Though this is a reoccurring and often necessary part of the trade, it

demonstrates how dance can be used as a harmful tool, in which case it contaminates the defining intention quality of dance.

As humanity can be referred to as a Moebius Strip, interactive and reciprocal, we dance in hopes of drawing connections with our God, ourselves, and each other. Our human nature desires expression and creativity that speaks to non-verbal cavities, as they are often deeper, more profound, greatest in impact, and prolific in our lives. Thus, dance is the materialization of this need. To be defined by its intent to communicate and connect, gives dance great relativity outside of the performance realm. Moreover, to view this theory in practice through cultural dance, makes dance all encompassing. It is both performance and pedestrian non-verbal, or bodily communication that channels an infinite range of messages, stories, ancestry, and emotions. For through dance lies understanding-“to activate the activities of the brain, to rekindle neglected centers of empathy and consequence, to get in beneath the level of language, to preserve the language of the heart and soul”- To Dance. (Edward Hall).

SUMMARY OF DANCE STUDIES

Summary of Dance Studies

Fundamentals of Dance Composition I & II

- Machine Study
- Sculpture Study
- Shape Study
- Partner Study
- Music Study
- Emotion/Word Study

This class was primarily designed to introduce dancers to a wide range of approaches to choreography and creation of dance. It was also designed to introduce dancers to basic Laban Concepts, and begin to develop our vocabulary that we might be equipped to write about dance.

Dance Styles and Forms

- Laban Efforts and Qualities
- Development of Aesthetic
- Environment Study
- Music Study
- Development of Motif
- Rhythm Study
- Exploring the works of different choreographers
- Developing a movement vocabulary and notation (Laban)

This class was much more systematic in its approach to dance and choreography. It required the student to systematically design movement pieces, incorporating levels of space (kinesphere), high, low, and middle, and the many different movement qualities and efforts. This class was designed to encourage the development of a personal aesthetic, with a clear understanding of movement vocabulary so that one is able to creatively stimulate their choreographic process and communicate to their dancers the quality of their requested movement dynamics.

Laban Movement Analysis

- Laban Notation
- Intense study of efforts and qualities
- Body/Movement Relationships
- Stages of movement development for a baby

This class was a more intensive study of the Laban Concepts. It dealt specifically with notation, and the dancer's ability to demonstrate an understanding of the concepts physically. The class later dealt with the body and movement, similar to Kinesiology, where we focused on the stages of baby movement- Head/Tail, Saginal, etc.

Music For Dance

- Music Notation
- Defining rhythm, beat, and key musical terms
- Music dance relationships
- Finding the beat in complex rhythmic scores
- Theories and terms: Beat, Rhythm, Notes (half, quarter, eighth, sixteenth)

This class was designed to create a platform for dancers when listening to music or scores. Choreographically it helped the artist to hear hidden elements of the music, so they might bring it out through the choreography. As dancers it simply allowed us to better relate to the music, so they create a harmony in our performance. It also helped if from the perspective of a dance instructor, to better guide the accompanying musician in class, for clarity of your musical requests.

To Dance is Human: Dance, Culture, and Society

- Speakers: Rolanda Reese, Dulce Capadoucica, Ramaa Bharadvaj, Lady Walquer, and Karen Golden
- Basket Projects
- Dance as a Human Experience
- Cultural Conversation
- Practicing the dances of the speakers
- Cultural Stories
- 50 Cultural Markers
- Theories and terms: Moebius Strip, Polyphrenic Mind, cell memory, Kinetic Mimicry

This class allowed for the exploration of dance as a human experience, versus a performance oriented, sort of elitist perspective of training. This class allowed for us as dancers and non dancers to discuss and explore culture, and the role of dance in the human experience. It allowed us to be personal with our approach to dance, bringing especially our cultural and familial influences to the art form, as it occurs amongst humanity in different forms.

Dance History

- The history of ballet
- The development of ballet in Europe and its influence in the American dance world
- The emergence of modern dance
- Dance and ethnicity in America
- Dance as a reflection of political, economic, and social construction
- Key figures in ballet and modern
- Dance and technology

This class was designed to give dancers a frame of reference in the pursuit of their art form. We were given information about the history and development of ballet and modern. We explored different opinions on dance history. We also discussed the current developments of dance, and attempted to define the lines between dance and technology.

Kinesiology I & II

- Muscular System
- Pulmonary System
- Respiratory System
- Skeletal System
- Nervous System: Central and Peripheral
- Affects of Eating, Drinking, and Breathing
- Alignment
- Foundations of the Body: Foot and Ankle and Pelvic Floor
- Muscle Structure of Foot, Ankle, Legs, and Pelvis
- Bone and Cartilage Formation
- Structure of the Knee
- Relationship of Spine, to Hip and Pelvic Floor, to Femur, to Tibia and Fibula, to Ankle, and Foot Arch- and vice versa
- Types of Joints
- Movement Directions- Supination, Pronation, Extension, Flexion, AB Duction, AD Duction

This AWESOME class dealt with the body from a dancer's perspective in great detail. Taught the importance of alignment, Breath, care for muscles, injuries, eating habits, etc. It was designed to facilitate a greater understanding of the body and how it moves so we can connect and target specifically the muscles and parts needed to achieve optimal technique without harming ourselves, and to prolong our dance life

Principles of Teaching

* I took this class through an internship where I studied in practice, the development of a pedagogy, how to run a dance program, teach a dance lesson, and simply connect with students. See pedagogy and essay for more information.

Ballet IV & V

This class is designed to strengthen the dancers overall technique, by acquiring a range of skills that will equip us to be technically proficient in any dance form. It is also designed to allow dancer to acquire an intrinsic understanding of classical ballet, and be able to execute classical ballet movement series.

Modern Dance Horton and Lewitzky

The Horton class as taught by Sarah, my freshman year, was designed to teach us classical modern, the foundations of modern dance through the classic Flat Back Series, Lateral T Positions, and several different Fortifications as implemented by Lester Horton. Skill in classical modern would serve as a great foundation and facilitates a dancers ability to be adaptable to stylized forms of dance, having acquired these basics. More classical modern such as Graham and Horton should be offered, as they appear to be prominent and necessary in the modern dance world.

The Lewitzky technique as taught by Loretta Livingston was geared towards the freedom of movement while applying technique to maintain performance quality. It also focused on strengthening the center and flexibility.

Commercial Jazz

Commercial Jazz as taught by Jason Myhre, focused on the development of performance quality, heavy usage of flexibility, strengthening of the center, and balance and coordination for turns.

World Dance- Dunham

Dunham as taught by Lady Walquer focused on strength and rhythmic coordination of cultural dance. She also covered dance as it is relevant to life principals and self-development.

MOVING TO A CITY

MOVING TO A CITY

Spring 2004

Loyola Marymount University
Dance Program

City Name: New York

Prepared By: Marjani A. Forté

Topic(s) Researched:

Housing, Apartments, Leases, Subletting, etc.

Sources:

1. Internet
2. New York Times
3. Primary Sources
4. Housing references

Specific Resources:

1. Long Island University Residence Life and Housing Department
2. The Office of Residential Life at Fordham University
441 East Fordham Road (ACN Basement)
Bronx, NY 10458
(718) 817-3080
3. www.sublet.com
4. Rent-Direct.com
5. US Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W., Washington, DC 20410
Telephone: (202) 708-1112 TTY: (202) 708-1455
6. New York City Housing Authority (NYC.gov)

Additional Information:

- One of the easiest ways to find housing in the city is through websites such as www.sublet.com, and Rent-Direct.com. You can search for apartments and housing without having to be in the city.
- If you do not have a primary resource to consult about particular areas in the city it may be beneficial to contact HUD, or The NYC Housing Authority to get an opinion on the places you are considering
- The universities listed provide housing for students that do not necessarily attend the university. They are also good referral sources. These universities, particularly LIU, would be a good starting ground if you have trouble finding housing. They are safe, highly monitored, and filled with students in similar positions and attending the university.

CURRENT AESTHETIC

*See Styles Forms Aesthetic Paper- Scott Heinzerling